

Introduction: In our studies in Luke we are embedded in the most tragic and most glorious event of human history. It is also the most important, as on what is taking place here hangs all of our hopes for salvation and reconciliation with a Just and Holy God.

- Jesus has been captured by the Jewish leaders, having been betrayed by His disciple Judas in the Garden. With the help of Roman soldiers, His custody has taken Him through a night interrogation by the Jewish leaders where they secured a confession of His claim to be the Son of God.
- In the morning hour they made a formal declaration of His guilt, and led Him to Pilate with the request that he would put Jesus to death. After multiple statements of Jesus' coming from the lips of Judas, Pilate, and Herod, Pilate seeks to set Him free. The leaders will not have this because of their envy, and are successful in stirring up a crowd in Jerusalem into a bloodthirsty mob who cries out for the release of a murderous traitor named Barabbas and the crucifixion of Jesus.
- Pilate buckles under this pressure, and delivers Jesus to their desires. Jesus' death through blood they want, and that is what they will get.
- I am going to depart from Luke once again here and turn us to Mark 15 to fill in two main features of the pre-cross events of our Lord.

I. JESUS IS SCOURGED [Mark 15:15b]

- Up to this point the main physical violence that has taken place was the facial beating Jesus had taken from the guards while blindfolded as they mocked His claim to be a prophet.
- In part of one verse we have the description of the scourging. Notice how small a part it is in the text. In contrast to the mocking that we will see in the next 5 verses, it is a very small part. It is actually a passing statement: "after he had scourged Him..."
- I couldn't help but think about the contrast between the relative silence of the physical violence done against our Lord as compared to the verbal violence. It seems that the writers are more interested in what people said to and about Jesus in their rejection of Him than in the details of the physical nature of His abuse.
- Realizing that this is the case, I want only to give the broadest sketch of what would have taken place. The condemned would be taken to a pillar and restrained there without the ability to defend himself or move much at all. Scourges or whips made of leather, well-worn by frequent use, and wielded by artisans of pain, were repeatedly brought on the whole backside and sides of the helpless victim. Sometimes the scourges that were used had woven into their thongs pieces of bone or metal to not only whelp the skin, but to tear the human flesh into ribbons.
- Grown men, hardened Roman soldiers of strength and endurance, wore out their prey as they repeatedly applied their power in their cruel task.
- When finished, the victim was little more than an open wound.
- We pass on quickly to that which the writers give more attention to, lest we ourselves are suffocated by the scene.

II. JESUS IS MOCKED [Mark 16-20]

- After this cruel torture, the soldiers of the governor (Pilate) who were in charge of Jesus' scourging lead Him into the Praetorium. This is the residence of Pilate, which seems to assume that the scourging was done somewhere else.
- They bring Jesus back in to be publicly displayed, and the whole garrison is called together, all the soldiers housed and assigned there.
- What I think is likely taking place here is a mock inauguration ceremony. When a new Caesar was recognized it was common that the Roman garrison such as this would gather in an official place like the Praetorium and pay recognition to the leader. The man would be dressed with a royal robe, crowned with a wreath, and given a scepter or staff as a symbolic representation of his authority. They would then cry out "Hail Caesar" repeatedly, with bowing and worshipping of the Divine Emperor.
- Following this patten, they strip Jesus, and put on Him a purple robe. This is possibly a discarded robe worn by a Roman official that was now merely a worn out rag, but still recognizable. They place this royal robe over His fresh wounds.
- Next, they fashion a crown of thorns and put it on His head. Remembering the biblical theme of the curse represented by thorns, here we have Jesus crowned and bearing the realities of the curse and the fall.
- They (according to Matthew) place a reed in His hand. Normally the scepters were made of iron, to symbolize a strong and enduring reign. A reed, while resembling a scepter, was easy to break, symbolizing a weak and despised reign.
- After this, the soldiers pay their homage to Him. "Hail, King of the Jews." Whenever Rome, the dominant world power, conquered a people, they were required to acknowledge Caesar as their king and demonstrate subdued submission. Here was have a mocking reversal: "How great are the Jews, how great is their king? Well, so great we as mighty soldiers of Rome will recognize Him as such."
- According to v.19, they take the reed, the symbol of His power and authority, and strike Him on the head, on which of course sat the crown of thorns. They demonstrate that they have to power to rip Jesus' so-called authority out of His hand and to defeat Him with it.

- Then, with the utmost contempt, they spit on Him, probably on His face. Now, with such contempt, they again bow their knee and worship Him. It is the mocking worship of one they despise and is to them a symbol of the people who were to them merely a conquered and inferior nation.
- When this cruel irony is over, they remove the robe (and probably the crown if it needed to be if not smashed to pieces), and put His own clothes back on Him. Then, according to Luke, they begin the way to the cross.
- Only as a passing comment here, in John's Gospel we are told that after all of this Pilate again presents Jesus to the Jews, perhaps with the hope that they will feel pity on the pathetic condition of their own countryman who only healed and did good everywhere He went. This did not work, and they again call for His crucifixion, and for His blood to be on them and on their children.

III. JESUS IS HELPED – v.26

- At this point Jesus has undergone a tremendous amount of physical and spiritual distress. He has endured the late night prayers of the garden as He began to drink the cup of God's wrath. He has endured the agonizing prayers in the garden. He has endured the stress and emotional upheaval of betrayal and arrest and abandonment of His disciples. He has endured the sleeplessness of an all night of the outworking of a conspiracy by interrogation and mockery and facial beating.
- He has endured facing the two great leaders of their land, and false accusations, false witnesses, and a crowd call out for His crucifixion. He has endured the unimaginable physical suffering of the scourging. He has endured mockery and continued physical abuse of the garrison soldiers. The degree of physical pain is far beyond anything He has ever known.
- It was common for a condemned criminal to be made to carry the crossbeam on which they were to be crucified, and a heavy beam sufficient to bear the weight of a full grown man was placed on the shoulders of Jesus. Who knows how many agonizing deaths that piece of wood had seen and how many times it had been down this path with the condemned?
- During this final death march the soldiers recognize that Jesus is incapable of carrying the weight any longer. It was not out of pity, but of necessity, that they realized Jesus needed help. There was no way that one of the four soldiers that would have been personally assigned to oversee His crucifixion, as it was a display of utter disgrace for a Roman citizen to bear a cross. So they needed a volunteer.
- But finding someone to carry the beam would not come easily, so they would need to force someone to carry it for Him. On their way they chose a man named Simon who was from Cyrene in North Africa. There are many anonymous characters in the Gospels that play some role, but who are not named, so often the preservation of a person's name in the Gospels assumes a knowledge of that person in the early church.
- Another particular we are given in Mark's Gospel is that he was the father of Alexander and Rufus. Again, this is a somewhat unusual construction. Often men were identified by their father (Stephen, Son of Joseph). Less frequent was it that the father was named, and then the sons unless the sons were known by the readers. So it may be that we have a reference to a man and his sons who, during the days of the apostles were known to the church and may have been Christians.
- Simon is taken and compelled to carry Jesus' beam. We are told that he bore it "after" Jesus, with the condemned in front and him following in the rear. In the rest of the narrative we can only imagine what took place. I assume that Simon bore that instrument of death the whole way to where Jesus would be crucified. What kind of questions were going through his head? What was he thinking of this man as he walked behind him (suspicious, disgust)?
- I think it's certain that he, as a Jewish worshipper, would have heard of Jesus, and maybe in the process of this death procession realized who it was. I think it's reasonable also to think that the words Jesus will speak to the women in the next verses would have been heard by him.
- When released from His burden at the site of the crucifixion, did Simon remain and watch? Was he converted through the things he saw and heard? We will likely never know in this life.
- All kinds of parallels and applications have been made about Simon in the past, and perhaps some of them are valid. What we know of sure and see is the humanity of Christ. This was not an indestructible and impervious superhero who would make it on His own. God provides for Him help to endure and make it to the site of crucifixion.
- If I could make an application here which I hope is not too "spiritualized" (and if it is, I trust you will excuse the indulgence), what we find is Jesus in need of support in the greatest moments of His suffering. Even here His Father was showing His care in giving Divine help through a human being, one who was likely not even a Christian.
- My application is that if the Lord Jesus needed such help, then surely do we in the times of our afflictions and difficulties. God does not expect us to be superheroes who are able to bear anything all by ourselves, but in need of the support and strength of others.

IV. JESUS IS LAMENTED – vv.27-31

- The last thing we learn about this journey to the cross from Luke is something that is unique to this Gospel. As there were great multitudes following on after them, there were among that throng a group of women who were mourning and lamenting.
- In the East at that time, as is still so in our own day, funerals and death were a very noisy affair. There is some question as to just what these women were doing. In some cases, professional mourners were hired for a funeral,

and would join with the family and with loud cries lament the death of someone. I don't think this is what is going on, as it is neither a funeral nor do I think it likely to suppose that they had been hired. It could be that this group of women were of the women who would be with Him all the way to the cross, those blessed female disciples who accompanied His mother Mary. I think this is unlikely as I look at the text because of what He instructs them to do.

- What I think rather was happening was that as these three condemned men (v.32) made their way to Golgotha, accompanied by the soldiers, there accumulated a group of women who, knowing that it was Jesus and having sympathy on HIM (notice that Luke tells us this explicitly...not THEM), they were bewailing His coming death and His present sorry condition.
- During this feast of the Passover, when people were supposed to be celebrating and rejoicing in memory of their escape from Egypt and God's miraculous rescue of them, these Jewish women see the condemned Jesus and are moved with compassion. What a contrast between their sympathy and that of the leaders.
- It is heard that Jesus, with Simon behind Him, turns to the women and corrects them with great anguish. Perhaps this is the reason God supplied Simon to bear the beam, so that Jesus would have enough strength to act one last time as a prophet to the nation.
- He addresses them as "daughters of Jerusalem." This phrase is used only one other place in the Bible, in the Song of Solomon. He views them particular as related to the Capitol City. In the midst of His suffering, in His moments of agony, He literally says "stop weeping for Me." In relation to His suffering, Jesus doesn't want them to weep for Him.
- He redirects their emotions to another object: themselves and their children. And He gives a reason for this. Very plainly, the days are coming when that which is ordinarily to be viewed as a blessing, pregnancy, child nurturing, breast feeding, will be counted a curse: a reversal of the creational blessing of children.
- Jesus is referring to the destruction of Jerusalem (which, according to history took place yesterday on September 1st in 70 A.D. Historical records reveal to us that during the siege of Jerusalem horrible things will take place, even undermining the natural affection of moms toward their children. In that day having children will be considered a curse, and they would wish that they had never had children.
- He goes on to say that people will wish for a quick death. They will call on creation itself, the mountains and rocks, to come crushing on them and give them a swift exit from this life. But their suffering will be prolonged and agonizing.
- He then uses an illustration of the difference between the time of green wood (when things are flourishing and fresh) and the dry wood (when there is lack of water, and all is ready to die).
- While it is difficult to understand just what Jesus is saying, He is certainly contrasting the blessings of His presence and the preaching of the Gospel in His day compared to the utter devastation of Jerusalem.
- In the rejection of Jesus as the Messiah, great sorrow will happen when God pours out His wrath upon the people of Israel. The nation, through its leaders, rejected Him, and in doing so brought certain destruction on themselves.
- An appropriate application here is that Jesus feeling sorry for His suffering, weeping for Him as we think about His suffering, is not appropriate. When someone is moved with sympathy for the sufferings of Christ apart from personal repentance and recognition of the judgment to come, it is misguided. Rather, there should be love and adoration for Him who saves us from the wrath to come.
- Our nation was moved for a time at the visible representation of Jesus' suffering in The Passion movie, but it is to be feared that Jesus would step into our time in history and tell us to stop weeping for Him. Rather, we should weep for the utter destruction that will come on our nation, and every other nation in final judgment, if there is not repentance and a turning to righteousness.
- We are called from looking upon these scenes in a merely sentimental way, and recognize that human sin is the reason for His suffering. If we do not receive Him, turning from our sins and accepting His salvation in walking in the way of righteousness, the time will come when we too will call upon the mountains to fall upon us for a quick death.
- Yet even that will not be the end, but there is the reality of our giving account to God for our lives, and either suffering eternally under His wrath from which no avalanche of destruction will snuff out our life, or else being found having the righteousness of Christ, we are delivered into His loving hands.